

Message Text

SECRET

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FM AMEMBASSY CAIRO

TO SECSTATE WASHDC NIACT IMMEDIATE 6402

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 CAIRO 9019

NODIS/CHEROKEE

FOR THE SECRETARY FROM AMBASSADOR

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR IS EG

SUBJECT: ISRAELI CARGO THROUGH SUEZ CANAL

REF STATE 216155

SUMMARY: DISCUSSED WITH FAHMY SUBSTANCE REFTEL.
HIS REACTION WAS SHARPLY NEGATIVE. WE WERE ASKING SADAT TO
COMMIT POLITICAL SUICIDE. THAT SADAT SHOULD BE ASKED TO DO THIS
24 HOURS AFTER HIS OWN PLEA TO PRESIDENT FORD MADE IT STILL WORSE.
THERE WERE OTHER REPROACHES. GENEVA TALKS ARE SHOWING THAT THE
ISRAELIS HAVE NO INTENTION OF ANY EXPEDITIOUS IMPLEMENTATION,
HENCE THE THREAT THAT THEY WILL NOT IMPLEMENT THE AGREEMENT MEANS
NOTHING. HE, FAHMY, WOULD HAVE NOTHING TO DO WITH THIS.
HIS ADVICE IS TO DELAY FOR TWO MONTHS. BY THIS TIME,
HOPEFULL, THE UPROAR WILL HAVE SUBSIDED. IF WE
REJECT HIS VIEW, I WAS FREE TO PUT THIS MATTER IN WRITING AND
GO TO SADAT. HE COULD TELL US NOW THAT THE PRESIDENT'S
REACTION WOULD BE NEGATIVE AND THAT HIS CONFIDENCE IN PRESIDENT
FORD AND YOUR STATED DESIRE TO STRENGTHEN HIM WOULD BE BADLY
SHAKEN. THE CHOICE WAS OURS. PLEASE INSTRUCT IF YOU WISH ME TO GO
DIRECTLY TO SADAT. IF SO, WE SHOULD BE SURE THAT WE HAVE WEIGHED
THE LIKELY CONSEQUENCES. END SUMMARY.

1. I HAVE JUST COME BACK FOR ONE AND A HALF HOUR MEETING
WITH FAHMY TO DISCUSS THE REFERENCE SUBJECT. IT WAS A
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TOUGH SESSION. I TOLD HIM THAT WE UNDERSTAND

THE PROBLEM WHICH WOULD BE RAISED BY HAVING THE FIRST ISRAELI CARGO TRANSIT AT THIS TIME, ESPECIALLY WITH THE WAY THE ISRAELIS ARE PUBLICIZING THE ISSUE. WE ALSO TAKE SERIOUSLY PRESIDENT SADAT'S REQUEST OF LAST NIGHT THAT WE URGE THE ISRAELIS NOT TO PRESS HIM ON THIS MATTER NOW. I POINTED OUT, HOWEVER, THAT THERE IS NEVER A REALLY GOOD TIME TO DO THIS. I RECALLED BOTH FAHMY AND SADAT HAD TOLD YOU DURING THE RECENT TALKS THAT A SHIP WITH AN ISRAELI CARGO COULD TRANSIT WHEN THE AGREEMENT WAS FIRM AND BEFORE THE KNESSET DEBATE. SINCE THIS WAS PASSED ON TO THE ISRAELIS IN GOOD FAITH, WE UNDERSTANDABLY FEEL SOME RESPONSIBILITY IN THIS MATTER. WE ARE CONCERNED THAT IF AN ISRAELI CARGO IS NOT PERMITTED THROUGH SOON THE ISSUE WILL BE SEIZED UPON BY CRITICS OF THE NEW AGREEMENT IN ISRAEL AND THE US AND PERHAPS EVEN PROVIDE A PRETEXT FOR NOT IMPLEMENTING THE AGREEMENT. I REMINDED HIM THAT ISRAEL'S PUBLIC POSITION IS THAT IT WILL NOT IMPLEMENT THE AGREEMENT UNTIL THE DISENGAGEMENT AGREEMENTS ARE FULFILLED.

2. I THEN GAVE FAHMY THE INFORMATION ABOUT THE SS VALENTINE, ITS CARGO AND ITS PROPOSED TRANSIT DATES. IN REQUESTING HIS FRANK JUDGMENT ON HOW TO HANDLE THIS DILEMMA, I TOLD HIM THAT IF SADAT AND CONCLUDED A SINGLE SHIP MIGHT BE PERMITTED TO TRANSIT THE CANAL BEFORE THE PROTOCOL IS SIGNED, WE WOULD SUPPORT EGYPT FULLY ON THE TRANSIT ISSUE BY TELLING THE ISRAELIS THAT THERE SHOULD BE NO PUBLICITY ON THE PASSAGE AT THIS TIME. IF THERE IS PUBLICITY, AT LEAST BEFORE THE PROTOCOL IS SIGNED, IT WOULD RAISE QUESTIONS ABOUT POSSIBILITY OF FURTHER PASSAGES.

I SAID ALSO WE WOULD TELL THE ISRAELIS THAT THERE IS NO QUESTION OF MORE THAN ONE SHIP PASSING THROUGH FOR AT LEAST THE NEXT SEVERAL WEEKS AND THAT WE WOULD WISH TO CONSULT WITH FAHMY BEFORE ANY FURTHER TRANSITS TAKE PLACE. IF, ON THE OTHER HAND, THIS IS REALLY A BAD TIME, WE WILL TAKE IT UP WITH THE ISRAELIS.

3. FAHMY'S REACTION WAS EXPLOSIVE. HE ASKED IF IT IS OUR PURPOSE TO RUIN SADAT. I TOLD HIM HE KNEW BETTER THAN THAT. OUR WHOLE PURPOSE IS TO
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STRENGTHEN THE PRESIDENT. FAHMY SAID HE COULD NOT BELIEVE THIS. SPEAKING AS SHARPLY AS I HAVE HEARD HIM, HE SAID WE COULD NOT POSSIBLY BE SO INSENSITIVE TO SADAT'S PREDICAMENT IF WE REALLY MEAN WHAT WE SAY ABOUT SUPPORTING HIM. TO ASK HIM TO PERMIT A CARGO THROUGH NOW WOULD BE POLITICAL SUICIDE AND PERHAPS PHYSICAL AS WELL. HE WANTED TO KNOW HOW WE COULD GIVE SADAT THE TYPE OF INFORMATION WE DID LAST NIGHT

AND STILL ASK HIM TO DO THIS. EITHER OUR UNDERSTANDING OF THE PROBLEM IS POOR OR WE ARE NOT SERIOUS AND ARE SIMPLY PLAYING THE ISRAELI GAME. I TOLD HIM WE FULLY UNDERSTAND THE PROBLEM, BUT AT SOME POINT THE ISSUE OF CARGO TRANSIT HAS TO BE FACED. IN A SENSE, THE SOONER THIS OBSTACLE IS HURDLED THE BETTER FOR EVERYONE. WE WERE DISCUSSING THE MATTER WITH HIM IN A SPIRIT OF FRANKNESS AND COOPERATION AND SOLELY BECAUSE WE WANT TO SEE THE AGREEMENT IMPLEMENTED.

4. FAHMY SCOFFED AT OUR POINT THAT THE LACK OF TRANSIT MIGHT PROVIDE A PRETEXT FOR THE ISRAELIS NOT TO IMPLEMENT THE AGREEMENT. IT IS CLEAR FROM THE CURRENT MEETINGS IN GENEVA, HE CONTENDED, THAT THE ISRAELIS HAVE NO INTENTION OF AN EXPEDITIOUS IMPLEMENTATION. (HE HAD RECEIVED A FULLY REPORT FROM MAHDOUB ABOUT THE ISRAELI PROPOSAL AND THE WAY IT WAS PRESENTED.) THE ISRAELIS HAD MADE IT CLEAR THAT THEY HAVE NO INTENTION OF MAKING ANY REDEPLOYMENT IN THE PASS AREA FOR THE FULL FIVE MONTHS. FAHMY SAID HE PERSONALLY WOULD BE PLEASED IF THE ISRAELIS DENOUNCE THE AGREEMENT BECAUSE OF THE TRANSIT ISSUE. IT WOULD BE THE BEST THING THAT COULD HAPPEN FOR EGYPT. I REMINDED FAHMY THAT BOTH SADAT AND HE WANTED THE AGREEMENT AND THAT EGYPT STANDS TO BENEFIT MATERIALLY FROM IT. FAHMY SAID THIS IS SOMETHING

THAT CAN BE SAID TO SADAT, BUT NOT TO HIM. WHATEVER OIL EGYPT MAY GET FROM ABU RUDAYS, IT COULD EASILY HAVE GOTTEN FROM THE SAUDIS AND OTHER ARABS. I TOLD HIM THAT, AS HE HIMSELF KNEW THIS HAD NOT BEEN THE CASE IN THE PAST.

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NODIS/CHEROKEE

5. NOTING THAT WE ARE IN EFFECT GIVING TWO DAYS NOTIC, FAHMY SAID HE COULD NOT BELIEVE THIS IS OUR FIRST KNOWLEDGE OF THE PROPOSED TRANSIT TIME. HE WANTED ME TO SAY THAT HE FIRMLY BELIEVES THAT YOU ALREADY KNEW THIS IN ALEXANDRIA AND HAVE DELIBERATELY

HELD UP TELLING THE EGYPTIANS UNTIL NOW. MOREOVER, SO FAR AS PUBLICITY IS CONCERNED, THE ISRAELIS HAVE ALREADY DONE THIS. ANY PROTEST WE MIGHT MAKE WOULD BE USELESS. IN ANY CASE, FAHMY POINTEDLY NOTED, WE HAVE BEEN SINGULARLY UNSEUCCESSFUL IN GETTING THE ISRAELIS TO DO ANY THING. I STRONGLY REBUTTED THIS. I TOLD HIM I WAS SURE YOU DID NOT HAVE EARLIER INFORMATION AND THAT OUR EFFORTS WITH THE ISRAELIS, WHILE NOT ALWAYS AS SUCCESSFUL AS WE MIGHT LIKE, HAVE BORNE FRUIT. HE, MORE THAN ANYONE SHOULD KNOW THIS. HE SIMPLY ACCUSED ME OF BECOMING NAIVE.

6. ALLUDING TO THE PRESIDENT'S PERTINENT COMMENT TO ME OF LAST NIGHT, FAHMY PROFESSED NOT TO BE ABLE TO UNDERSTAND HOW WE COULD BE TREATING THIS SO LIGHTLY. I STRESSED THAT WE WERE NOT TREATING SADAT'S PROBLEM LIGHTLY, BUT VERY SERIOUSLY. FAHMY RESPONDED THAT SADAT'S COMMENT HAD BEEN MADE IN A MESSAGE TO PRESIDENT FORD, NOT TO YOU. WAS SADAT NOW TO UNDERSTAND THAT PRESIDENTFORD IS BEHIND THIS MESSAGE AND IN EFFECT URGING HIM TO COMMIT POLITICAL SUICIDE ONLY TWENTY FOUR HOURS AFTER SADAT'S EARNEST APPEAR HAD BEEN SENT? I AGAIN POINTED OUT THAT OUR WHOLE PURPOSE WAS TO ASK FOR HIS AND SADAT'S VIEWS ON HOW TO HAND LE

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THE DIFFICULT CARGO DILEMMA. WE WERE ASKING THAT HE CONSIDER THE PROBLEM AND GIVE US HIS MOST CONSISTENT VIEW. WE WERE NOT TRYING TO PUT HIM OR THE PRESIDENT ON THE SPOT.

7. FAHMY THEN SUGGESTED I PUT THE MATTER IN WRITING AND TAKE IT UP DIRECTLY WITH THE PRESIDENT. HE, FAHMY, WOULD HAVE NOGHINT TO DO WITH IT. THE PRESIDENT COULD THEN PERSONALLY SEE HOW LITTLE REGARD PRESIDENT FOR OR YOU HAVE FOR HIS PREDICAMENT. HE WOULD SEND THE LETTER TO SADAT WITHOUT COMMENT FOR THE LATTER'S DECISION. IF ASKED, HE WOULD TELL THE PRESIDENT HE HAD CONVEYED TO YOU THAT WHAT IS BEING PROPOSED IS POLITICAL MADNESS. HE REFUSED TO CALL THE PRESIDENT HIMSELF, BUT SAID I WAS FREE TO GO OVER HIS HEAD AND DO SO. I TOLD FAHMY THAT I HAD NO DESIRE TO GO AROUND HIM, AND AGAIN IMPRESSED WE WERE SIMPLY ASKING FOR HIS BEST JUDGMENT. I WOULD CONVEY HIS VIEWS TO YOU. IF YOU FELT THAT DESPITE

HIS VIEWS, I SHOULD APPEAL DIRECTLY TO THE PRESIDENT, I WOULD OF COURSE HAVE TO DO SO. BEFORE I MADE ANY SUCH APPROACH, HOWEVER, I WOULD WANT TO LET HIM KNOW. FAHMY'S

RESPONSE WAS THAT THIS IS ENTIRELY UP TO YOU. IF WE WANTED THE PRESIDENT'S CONFIDENCE IN US FURTHER SHAKEN, HE SUGGESTED THE BEST WAY IS TO GO AHEAD AND RAISE THE CARGO ISSUE DIRECTLY WITH HIM NOW. SUCH AN APPROACH WOULD LEAVE A PERMANENT SCAR WITH SADAT, BUT IF THAT IS WHAT WE WANT TO CREATE, IT IS OUR BUSINESS. ONCE MORE I TOLD FAHMY THAT OUR WHOLE PURPOSE IS TO BE CONSTRUCTIVE AND POSITIVE AND TO LOOK FOR WAYS OF WORKING THIS DIFFICULT PROBLEM OUT WITH OUR EGYPTIAN FRIENDS.

8. IF HE DID NOT THINK THE PRESENT TIME RIGHT, I ASKED HIM WHEN IT MIGHT BE POSSIBLE. FAHMY RESPONDED THAT THE ISRAELIS COULD HAVE SENT A CARGO THROUGH IN JUNE OR ANY TIME THEREAFTER, BUT THEY SHOULD NOT DO SO NOW WHEN THE ARAB WORLD IS IN AN UPROAR BECAUSE OF THE AGREEMENT. IN TWO MONTHS' TIME (HE MENTIONED TWO MONTHS FROM TODAY, NOV 11) THEY COULD DO SO. BY THEN, HOPEFULLY SOME OF THE FUROR WILL HAVE ABATED. THEY COULD AT THAT TIME SEND AS MANY CARGOES THROUGH AS THEY WISH. BY THEN, TOO, THE OILFIELDS SHOULD HAVE BEEN RETURNED AND MAKE THE WHOLE CARGO TRANSIT PROPOSITION EASIER FOR EGYPT.

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9. COMMENT: THE ABOVE IS A TAME DISTILLATION OF FAHMY'S SHARPLY NEGATIVE AND REPROACHFUL REACTION. WE NOW HAVE THE CHOICE OF GOING OVER FAHMY'S HEAD TO SADAT OR TELLING THE ISRAELIS TO DEFER ANY CARGO TRANSIT FOR A PERIOD OF TIME, PREFERABLY FOR TWO MONTHS. IF WE GO TO SADAT, I THINK IT IS A SAFE BET THAT HIS ANSWER WILL BE NEGATIVE. STILL WORSE, HIS TRUST IN US, INCLUDING IN PRESIDENT FORD, WILL BE BADLY SHAKEN. IF YOU WISH, HOWEVER, I AM PREPARED TO GO TO HIM SO LONG AS WE HAVE WEIGHED THE RISKS OF SUCH A COURSE. PLEASE INSTRUCT.
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